14 Spring Street
New York 12, N. Y.
February 11, 1955

Mr. Amos Vogel
Cinema 16, Inc.
175 Lexington Ave.
New York 16, N. Y.

Dear Amos,

In reply to your announcement that "Desistfilm" would be premiered on your forthcoming program of "first films", I wish to make one thing clear. I don't care what program you show "Desistfilm" on; however I don't want this film presented as a first attempt at movie making on my part. I made two complete films (totaling nearly an hour's running time) not to mention a number of incompleted film projects previous to the creation of "Desistfilm". One of them, "Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection", as you have seen, is a piece of conventional photographic mastery. My insistance that this be understood by an audience viewing "Desistfilm" is simply this: I don't want people to be able to dismiss the photographic experimentalization of my 3rd film as the amateurish "Shortcomings" of a first work. Anyone who does this usually misses the whole point of the film. Also, I hope it has been made clear that "Desistfilm" is not a documentary of a dope party.

The following are answers to your questionaire:

1. J. Stan Brakhage, 14 Spring Street, Age 22, Presently occupied (as always) making plans for a new film.

2. I have searched far and wide in this country and have yet to find a formal training program, in schools or otherwise, which could be of any use whatso-ever to film artists. All the film educational courses I have ever seen, all of them rolled together, are not worth the price of one roll of film and a rented camera as far as creative expression in film is concerned. I began with the roll of film and the rented camera. Prior to "Desistfilm" I made the two long films as explained in the paragraph above.

3. I wrote an informal scenario for "Desistfilm" and manipulated the drunken actors into scenes which fulfilled the requirements of the content of that scenario. The rest is improvisation. All photography, direction, and editing was entirely my own work. I also composed the experimental sound track which accompanies the film.

4. This film is the product of one entire night's bacchanale . . . about 12 hours shooting time.

5. Bell and Howell DL - 70, B & H lenses (reg and wide angle), Ansco war surplus film, photofloods with tin-foil reflectors, Revere tape recorder.

6. 3 rolls film and processing; $10.00, magnetic tape; $3.00, silent print; $15.00, optical track, duplicate negative, two composit prints; $100.00. Total: $128.00

7. I saved the money from my commercial photographic jobs and produced the film by myself.

8. "Desistfilm" was made as a creative enterprise with the intention of getting as much money back on it as I could.

9. This subject seemed best suited at the time to give me free rein for experimental expression, whereas my earlier films had all demanded a mastery of certain techniques to convey their intricate dramatic structure.

10. I was already well aware of the problems and pitfalls of film production, having the experience of two much more expensive films.

11. Since "Desistfilm" I have made 5 more films under the same financial conditions.

12. It was through this film that I discovered the adventure of what I call the "improvizational film", where the general content of the film is preconceived while the camera techniques, and even dramatic motivations, are created spontaneously during the photographing and editing. From "Desistfilm" on, I have worked almost entirely without script or scenario, preferring a more immediate touch with the creation on film.

13. I am completely satisfied with what this film has accomplished for myself. As I have no criteria to determine what might be a perfect film, I can only speak for my own personal achievement. Whatever areas of the film were not explored completely have provided incentive for new films.

14. You have further comments of mine in your file.

Very truly yours,

J. Stan Brakhage

J. Stan Brakhage

Scanned from the collections of the
Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research,
with support from the
National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

https://wcftr.commarts.wisc.edu

https://archives.gov/nhprc